

AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

1-18. (Cancelled)

19. (Original) An automatic sales machine for selling a product, the product identity being concealed at the time of offer, the sales machine comprising:

a processor;

a memory connected to said processor storing a program to control the operation of said processor;

the processor operative with the program in the memory to:

maintain a database of product data, including normal price data and minimum acceptable price data for each of a plurality of products;

identify a monetary value available for purchasing a product;

select a product from among the plurality of products based on the monetary value and the minimum acceptable price data;

output via an output device an offer of the product to a consumer;

determine whether the consumer accepts the offer; and

dispense the product if the consumer accepts the product, thereby revealing the identity of the product to the consumer.

20-22. (Cancelled)

23. (Original) The automatic sales machine of claim 19, wherein the processor is further operative with the program in the memory to select a combination of products.

24-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Original) The automatic sales machine of claim 19, wherein the processor is further operative with the program in the memory to determine whether the monetary value is at least as great as the lowest minimum acceptable price, and to offer the product

performed only upon determining that the monetary value is at least as great as the lowest minimum acceptable price.

27. (Cancelled)

28. (Original) The automatic sales machine of claim 19, wherein the database further includes expiration data for each of the plurality of products and wherein the processor is further operative with the program in the memory to select the product based on the expiration data.

29. (Original) The automatic sales machine of claim 19, wherein the database further includes profitability data for each of the plurality of products and wherein the processor is further operative with the program in the memory to select the product based on the profitability data.

30-48. (Cancelled)

49. (Previously presented) A computer-readable storage medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for selling a product from a vending machine, the product identity being concealed at the time of offer, the processing instructions for directing a computer to perform the steps of:

- maintaining a database of product data, including normal price data and minimum acceptable price data for each of a plurality of products;

- identifying a monetary value available for purchasing a product;

- selecting a product from among the plurality of products based on the monetary value and the minimum acceptable price data;

- offering the product to a consumer via an output device;

- determining whether the consumer accepts the product; and

- dispensing the product if the consumer accepts the product, thereby revealing the identity of the product to the consumer.

50-52. (Cancelled)

53. (Previously presented) An automatic sales machine for selling a product, the product identity being concealed at the time of offer, the sales machine comprising:

- a processor;
- an output device in communication with the processor;
- a dispensing device in communication with the processor;
- a memory in communication with the processor, the memory storing a program to control the operation of said processor, the processor operative with the program in the memory to:

- determine a respective profit margin for each of a plurality of products;
 - output via the output device an offer of a combination of products to a consumer;
 - determine whether the consumer accepts the offer;
 - select, based on the respective profit margin for each of the plurality of products, a first product from among the plurality of products; and
 - transmit a signal to dispense the first product and a second product if the consumer accepts the offer.

54. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, the processor being further operative with the program in the memory to determine a respective minimum acceptable price for each of the plurality of products.

55. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, the processor being operative with the program in the memory to select the first product from among the plurality of products after determining whether the consumer accepts the offer.

56. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, the processor being operative with the program in the memory to select the first product from among the plurality of products before determining whether the consumer accepts the offer.

57. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, in which the selected first product has the lowest profit margin among the plurality of products.

58. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, in which the selected first product has the highest profit margin among the plurality of products.

59. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, in which the offer does not disclose an identity of any of the combination of products.

60. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, in which the offer does not disclose a trademark of any of the combination of products.

61. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, the processor further operative with the program in the memory to:

determine respective expiration data for each of the plurality of products; and
in which the processor is operative with the program in the memory to select, based on the respective profit margin and the respective expiration data for each of the plurality of products, the first product from among the plurality of products.

62. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, the processor further operative with the program in the memory to:

determine respective demand data for each of the plurality of products; and
in which the processor is operative with the program in the memory to select, based on the respective profit margin and the respective demand data for each of the plurality of products, the first product from among the plurality of products.

63. (Previously presented) The automatic sales machine of claim 53, the processor further operative with the program in the memory to:

automatically determine revenue data associated with the plurality of products;
and

in which the processor is operative with the program in the memory to select, based on the respective profit margin for each of the plurality of products and the revenue data, the first product from among the plurality of products.

64. (Previously presented) A method, comprising:

offering for sale, by a vending machine, a plurality of products, wherein each product of the plurality of products is associated with a retail price, and wherein the retail prices are displayed to consumers;

selecting, by a processing device of the vending machine, one of the plurality of products to be offered as a mystery product, wherein the selection is based at least in part on data associated with the selected product;

calculating, by the processing device, a mystery product price for the selected mystery product, wherein the mystery product price is greater than a pre-determined minimum acceptable price for the mystery product and less than the retail price associated with the mystery product;

displaying an offer for the mystery product to consumers, the offer comprising an indication of the mystery product price, and wherein the offer does not comprise an indication of the identity of the mystery product;

determining, by the processing device, an acceptance of the offer by a consumer; receiving, by the vending machine, an indication of funds provided by the consumer;

determining, by the processing device, that the funds are greater than or equal to the mystery product price; and

dispensing the mystery product to the consumer.

65. (Previously presented) The method of claim 64, wherein the offer comprises an indication of a category associated with the mystery product.

66. (Previously presented) The method of claim 64, wherein the data associated with the mystery product comprises an expiration date of the mystery product.

67. (Previously presented) The method of claim 64, wherein the data associated with the mystery product comprises a stock date of the mystery product.

68. (Previously presented) The method of claim 64, wherein the data associated with the mystery product comprises a sales rate of the mystery product.

69. (Previously presented) The method of claim 64, wherein the data associated with the mystery product comprises an inventory of the mystery product.

70. (Previously presented) The method of claim 64, wherein the data associated with the mystery product comprises a profit margin of the mystery product.

71. (Previously presented) The method of claim 64, wherein the data associated with the mystery product comprises at least two of:

- an expiration date of the mystery product;
- a stock date of the mystery product;
- a sales rate of the mystery product;
- an inventory of the mystery product; and
- a profit margin of the mystery product.

72. (Previously presented) A method, comprising:

displaying, via a display device of a vending machine, an offer for a mystery product, wherein the offer only identifies a category associated with the mystery product and a mystery product price associated with the mystery product;

receiving, from a consumer, an indication of an acceptance of the displayed offer;
receiving, by the vending machine, an indication of funds provided by the consumer;

determining, by a processing device of the vending machine, that the funds are greater than or equal to the displayed mystery product price; and

dispensing the mystery product to the consumer.

73. (Previously presented) The method of claim 72, wherein the category comprises a “snack” category.
74. (Previously presented) The method of claim 72, wherein the category comprises a “drink” category.
75. (Previously presented) The method of claim 72, further comprising:
selecting, by the processing device, the mystery product from a plurality of available products offered for sale by the vending machine, wherein the mystery product is selected from a subset of the available products that are associated with the displayed category.
76. (Previously presented) A method, comprising:
displaying, via a display device of a vending machine, an offer for a mystery package comprising a first mystery product and a second mystery product, wherein the offer only identifies (i) a first category associated with the first mystery product, (ii) a second category associated with the second mystery product, and (iii) a mystery package price associated with the mystery package;
receiving, from a consumer, an indication of an acceptance of the displayed offer;
receiving, by the vending machine, an indication of funds provided by the consumer;
determining, by a processing device of the vending machine, that the funds are greater than or equal to the displayed mystery package price; and
dispensing each of the first and second mystery products to the consumer.
77. (Previously presented) The method of claim 76, further comprising:
selecting, by the processing device, the first mystery product from a first subset of a plurality of available products offered for sale by the vending machine, the first subset being associated with the first category; and

selecting, by the processing device, the second mystery product from a second subset of a plurality of available products offered for sale by the vending machine, the second subset being associated with the second category.

78. (Previously presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the first and second categories are different.

79. (Previously presented) The method of claim 78, wherein the first category comprises a “snack” category and wherein the second category comprises a “drink” category.

80. (Previously presented) A method, comprising:

receiving, by a vending machine, an indication of a product category that defines a subset of products offered for sale by the vending machine, the product category being selected by a consumer;

receiving, by the vending machine, an indication of a monetary amount provided by the consumer;

selecting, by a processing device of the vending machine, and based on the product category selected by the consumer and the monetary amount provided by the consumer, a mystery product associated with the product category, wherein a minimum price associated with the mystery product is less than or equal to the monetary amount provided by the consumer; and

dispensing the mystery product to the consumer, the dispensing revealing the identify of the mystery product to the consumer.

81. (Previously presented) A method, comprising:

receiving, by a vending machine, an indication of a selection of a product by a consumer

receiving, by the vending machine, an indication of funds provided by the consumer;

determining, by a processing device of the vending machine, that an amount of change is due to the consumer;

identifying a product offered for sale by the vending machine that is associated with a minimum acceptable price that is less than or equal to the amount of change due to the consumer;

offering the identified product to the consumer as a mystery product in exchange for the amount of change due to the consumer;

determining an acceptance of the offer;

dispensing the selected product to the consumer; and

dispensing the mystery product to the consumer, the dispensing of the mystery product revealing the identify of the mystery product to the consumer.

82-83. (Cancelled)

84. (New) A vending machine operable to:

automatically select, based on stored data, a mystery product from a plurality of products available for sale via the vending machine; and

sell the mystery product to a customer without revealing, until after the customer has committed to the sale, which product was automatically selected as the mystery product.

85. (New) The vending machine of claim 84, wherein the stored data is indicative of a sales rate of the mystery product.

86. (New) The vending machine of claim 84, wherein the stored data is indicative of an available amount of positive inventory of the mystery product.

87. (New) The vending machine of claim 84, wherein the stored data is indicative of a profit margin of the mystery product.

88. (New) The vending machine of claim 84, wherein the stored data is indicative of a demand for the mystery product.

89. (New) The vending machine of claim 84, wherein the vending machine is operable to sell the mystery product by comprising a mystery button that is operable to be actuated by a customer to cause the mystery product to be dispensed.

90. (New) A vending machine operable to:
store a plurality of units of a plurality of product types;
automatically select, based on stored data, a particular unit from the plurality of units that is most desirable to move out of the vending machine; and
sell the particular selected unit to a customer as a mystery product, without revealing, until after the customer has committed to the sale, which product type the mystery product belongs to.

91. (New) The vending machine of claim 90, wherein the stored data is indicative of an expiration date of the particular unit selected as the mystery product.

92. (New) The vending machine of claim 91, wherein the particular unit is selected as most desirable to move out of the vending machine because the expiration date of the particular unit is identified as one of the soonest expiration dates among all of the plurality of units.

93. (New) The vending machine of claim 90, wherein the stored data is indicative of a stock date of the particular unit selected as the mystery product.

94. (New) The vending machine of claim 93, wherein the particular unit is selected as most desirable to move out of the vending machine because the stock date of the particular unit is identified as one of the oldest stock dates among all of the plurality of units.